

Bad boy, bad boy, watcha gonna do? Watcha gonna do when Paramount comes for you?
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When Borg Attack

The room was dark but for a nebulous rectangle of light hovering approximately half a meter above a dull metallic base. Abruptly the light level changed as a door slid open to admit two beings, but relative darkness quickly returned. The two beings sat down without a word before a large console. The smaller of the pair reached forward to flick a few switches and push a button or two. The rectangle, until this point a steady off-white color, immediately grayed.

The darkness of the holodisplay became absolute before beginning to lighten slightly; the end result was a seeming of space, complete with miniature stars, caught in a floating cage without bars. The view panned sideways before swinging down in a nauseating spiral, leveling out as a distant ship came into view. Closer and closer rushed the vessel, until it virtually filled the display with its cube-shaped menace. A sudden still shot of the feared sight halted the ship in its tracks. Fade out to a gaseous nebula, green writing appearing with a shimmer. Through it all played a classic theme song with a strong backbeat.

Gyola leaned forward to flick the "pause" switch. The recording immediately halted midframe, angular green words hovering fuzzily in front of a purple-tinged nebula. "'When Borg Attack?' What type of name for a program is that?" The senior editor's tail swished back and forth in agitation.

Arshly gulped as he flattened his ears to his skull, turning to peer down at his console as if an interesting button had suddenly materialized. "Well," he answered, "research says that the 'When <Insert Entity Here> Attacks' is a popular title, especially the Andorian episode. I personally thought 'Ship of Death' was perfect, but another network already used that for a special on some vessel traversing the Delta Quadrant. Therefore...well...'When Borg Attack'."

Gyola growled deep in her throat. "It's your butt on the line, not mine. You were the one that begged for the assignment, begged for the chance to strut your stuff. I'm only here to see the final product. If it doesn't get the ratings the station needs for the upcoming sweeps, you're going to be the one explaining it to the big ears."

The small male scuffed his feet under the chair, listening to the sound of his toe claws lightly scrap the plastiwood floor. "Trust me on this. It will go over well with the viewers. One of our best camera crews was on the job, and the stuff the GPS mech brought back was stunning...and that was the /raw/ footage! Cutting and clean-up worked miracles on an already fabulous tape!" Arshly's voice raised in volume as he described the work, taking on the forcefulness of a prophet at the marketplace.

"Fine, fine. The holodisplay is all well and good, but I want to see the senso cut. That is what the majority of the audience is going to demand, and this will be our first full sweeps with that format. It will make or break this company's bid to compete among the Big Four."

Arshly abruptly quieted. "Yes'm. The senso is ready. If you will put on the gear, I will spin up the disc."

Gyola was already placing the light blue headband over her forehead, clasping it at the back of her head. A few minor adjustments lined optic contacts in the simple seeming piece of machinery over the mates which had been surgically inserted into her skull three years prior

when the technology was beginning to go mainstream. Senso tech was now the ultimate tool for computer and mass media interface. Radio, television, holodisplays, and now senso...the evolution of information dissemination was poised to make a leap equivalent to the journey between a worm and the contemporary Fluvian species.

Seeing Gyola ready, Arshly spoke a command to the computer, initiating the senso cut. Before the docudrama could begin, he shoved his own headband on, then leaned back in the chair to enjoy the show.

* * * * *

<At base of viewer perception, a floating red bar. Superimposed on the insert were black numbers and words: "Designation: 4 of 8, also Captain. Location: Nodal Intersection #19 of subsection 17, submatrix 10. Time: P93.11a JL.">

"You want to know why we are out here?" The Borg drone swiveled his neck without moving the rest of his body, looking directly into the camera before gazing pointedly at the off-screen cameraman. He then turned back to a large monitor full of floating multicolored bubbles - a screensaver? "Why we are out here. I'll give you the quick answer and the politically correct one. Not much the Collective can do to us, since it already knows the consensus of this crew on the matter.

"Quick answer: to get this sub-collective and its inharmonious minds away from the Greater Consciousness."

Pause as the bubbles abruptly shifted to a Mandelbrot pattern of infinite fractals.

"Politically correct answer: to introduce species #8511 to the perfection of the Borg."

A murmuring from off-screen, indistinct words not understood.

"Oh, I see. You meant here, in this nebula. That is an easy one. We've been tracking species #8511 for a while and the trail has lead us here. Unfortunately, the track is cold, and lost in the surrounding gasses and dust, so this cube needs to find a source of information as to the next direction to take to find the species' homeworlds. Usually we of this cube are not permitted to assimilate beings for information, but in this case, as we are the only ones in the vicinity, an exception has been made.

"Cube #347 is to find a suitable ship or lone colony, then process several individuals. The major problem is an ability called 'grouf'; the damn beings have a technologically boosted form of psychic matter manipulation that allows whole populations to teleoperate in distant systems without risking their own bodies. We've passed up five places now with indications of sentient activity because we've also seen signs that 'reality' isn't so real. We'll be at system number six in a short time. There are high hopes for this one."

Captain went silent as the viewscreen shifted once again, this time to multiple eyes opening and closing in an eerie fashion.

<Fade out followed by fade in on Captain in same intersection. New bar at base of perception: "Time: We1.92h MN".>

"Here, look at this." Captain motioned for the camera to view the screen in the nodal intersection. The scene shifted as the operator complied. Captain's voice continued, speaking now out of immediate perception.

A computerized depiction of a solar system filled the screen, small planets whirling in distant orbits from an orange-yellow star. A large band was grayed; a hypothetical metacamera zoomed in on the obscured area, revealing millions of asteroids tumbling in their personal trajectories about the primary.

Another zoom swept in closer yet, picking out a rock and transforming it to elephantine proportion. Near this rock several oddly shaped ships floated, tethered to an unseen central buoy. Small only when compared to what was now obvious to be a strip mining operation, dozens of lesser tugs transported tons of finished product to the huge ore carriers, forming a thread of blue reaction thrusters.

"This is one of four material extraction operations in this system. It appears to be a new set-up...and more importantly there are no signatures of that damned group. Consensus has decided it is the real deal. The mining appears largely robotic in nature, although a few life signs are present on the large transports." The superstructure of one of the big ships fuzzed, displaying nine yellow triangles scattered throughout the vague shadow.

"We have no interest in the ore carriers." The view pulled back slightly, then rotated to a different quadrant of the asteroid. Two additional ships lurked, of the same configuration but much smaller and somehow sleeker in the manner of predators. "Those are the targets. Light military attack frigates, one hundred twenty crew each. No problems are anticipated with their capture."

The camera drunk in the picture of the two frigates, then turned back to Captain. He listened to a short query, then answered: "How did we provide such good pictures? We are Borg after all. Of course, we are also beginning our attack now; this cube has been in the short-range sensor envelope for over an hour."

<Switch to exterior feed.>

Two ships, shaped like large barbells, were swiveling around their long axis, turning from broadside to head-on to present a smaller profile. The transports, similarly silhouetted, if five times the bulk, began to wallow ponderously in the opposite direction, one by one streaking away in conventional warp. The ore carriers were essentially ignored, a cutting beam from off-camera shooting out to splash a shield in a parting gesture.

Return fire came as the frigates separated, preparing to flank the much larger cube. Torpedoes lit the ether with blue flashes, and violet phasers searched for a weakness against Borg shields. Futile. The camera's view turned to follow the fate of one of the barbells as a tractor beam attempted to capture it. Twice the ship slipped free as the tractor blatantly missed the defender's hull, but the third time it locked on. A pair of green phaser blasts angled from the lower screen into the front section of the military ship. An orange explosion momentarily lit the dark, then disappeared into a cloud of expanding debris.

The camera abruptly switched to another sensor, this one aimed at the remaining frigate, view almost directly above the action as seen from a cube edge. The prey was trying to disengage from the lopsided fight, but was caught in the clutches of yet another tractor beam. "We are the Borg. Resistance is futile. Lower your shields and prepare to be assimilated," boomed the Collective Voice. It was obviously a link into communications because vacuum could not carry sound.

The ship continued to resist, managing to destroy an emitter with a heavy barrage of torpedoes, consequently taking out the camera in the process. Another sensor abruptly cut in, this

one looking "up" at the action. Two more tractors secured the ship. Phasers began to batter at the shields of the much smaller vessel; electromagnetic protection fell. Finally a cutting beam lanced out, tagging the hull along one bulge of the barbell, seeming delicate in its destructive capability. As a scar of melted metal began to bubble into vacuum, the frigate abruptly stopped firing, main power system severed.

<Scene fades out. An extended blank spot indicates the location of commercials to be added later, followed by a fade in at new location. Red bar: "Designation: 20 of 300, Weapons hierarchy. Location: Aboard species #8511 military ship. Time: J4.04z MN".>

"This is the part I hate the most," said the Borg drone. He was speaking over his shoulder as he attempted to peer around a hallway corner. The purple lance of an energy weapon tagged the ceiling directly above, causing sparks to rain down into the scene. The drone pulled back.

"I don't really mind the boredom when we go from system to system. I mean, you plug your body into your alcove and let your mind float, allowing others to use your mental resources. Not everyone can do that, but I've never had any problem. No, I don't like assaults. The shooting, the noise, the uncertainties. One minute you are standing there, the next you are sent into the onslaught of phaser fire so the Collective can test weaponry frequencies. Adaptation of personal shielding is nice...but the guinea pig part is tough."

Across the corridor, three drones transported in, green signature effects temporarily distorting the camera's picture. When it cleared, purple phaser fire was thick. One drone was struck, dropping to the deck plates; the other two scurried to cover. 20 of 300 groaned.

"Excuse me. Weapons is busy coordinating a rush on another deck, and is trying to force us to do so here as well. We've told him that there are not enough bodies to assure success. That should give me a few more minutes, at least."

A mumbled question was asked. The camera took a close-up shot of the downed drone, then returned to 20 of 300's face. Between the flickering overhead lights and obscuring implants it was impossible to tell the original species of 20 of 300, much less note any change in expression.

"Oh? That was 143 of 212. I stress 'was'. She's terminated now. Spare scrap and parts for Doctor. That is one frequency that is useless for species #8511, but 143 of 212's presence is now only an echo. Too bad; she was an excellent hierarchy member."

Another query off-camera.

"Anything good about this assault? You have got to talk to your producers about using relevant questions. But, if you insist..."

"We have thus far only found conventional weapons and military crew. Personally, that group ability gives me the willies, but we haven't encountered it yet on this ship. I will be glad when we have the chance to examine some of those to be assimilated to find out the extent of the talent. It must be heavily linked to technology; consensus postulates that when we severed all power systems except life support, group was lost as well. We'll find out soon enough."

Eight more drones beamed into the corridor, this time out of line of sight of the unseen defenders at the other end of the disputed hallway. 20 of 300 shook his head. "We've been ordered to advance. Hopefully the battles in the other parts of this frigate have allowed adaptation to weaponry. Here goes."

20 of 300 stepped around the corner, along with five others on the opposite side of the corridor. Purple phaser fire increased six-fold, scoring walls and melting ragged burn scars on

the ceiling. The camera pointed around the corner, trying to follow the action. A near miss forced the cameraman to withdraw, but not before seeing 20 of 300 fall heavily to the deck, torso and leg smoking.

The scene suddenly whirled as the cameraman jumped, startled by something. The picture fuzzed in and out of focus, finally ending on the visage of one of the drones who had not been part of the initial attack.

<Red bar reappears at the bottom of the picture. All attributes are the same, except designation now reads 29 of 300.>

"I'm baby-sitting you now. Follow me." The attitude of the new drone much more gruff than 20 of 300. As the drone stepped into a corridor that moments before had been a death trap of focused electromagnetic beams, a lone phaser shot splashed off her shielding. 29 of 300 ignored the annoyance. She stepped over the body of 20 of 300.

"Is he okay? Of course he isn't okay. He's alive, that's about all that can be said for 20 of 300." A transporter activated, snatching away the fallen drone. "He's in a maintenance bay now. It will take major reconstruction to make him useful again."

The Borg turned to face down the corridor. A hastily erected barrier was in pieces, metal scattered everywhere. Beyond the obstacle another drone could be seen. It yanked its right limb away from the neck of another biped, then began to herd the tan uniformed, pale-skinned being away. 29 of 300 beckoned, catching the camera's attention.

"If you will continue to follow me, there is a concentration of resistance in the main engineering core, as well as the shrine room. Weapons is telling us to mop up. The assault will run much more smoothly now that this sub-collective has adapted to the weaponry."

29 of 300 strolled down the hallway; the camera trailed behind.

<Fade out and return. Ubiquitous red status bar: "Designation: 27 of 27, also Doctor. Location: Cube #347, Drone Maintenance Bay #9, subsection 4, submatrix 26. Time: A9.2c KU".>

"Oh, hello there. I was told you were going to visit. Give me a few minutes to wrap up here." Doctor's form was reminiscent of an upright rodent with a slightly squashed snout, clothed in the typical attire of all Borg. One hand reached up to select a device from an overhanging contraption. A high pitched whine momentarily sounded in the maintenance bay as the stubby end of the palm-sized machine was set against the torso of the drone on the table.

"All done! Well, at least the big stuff. 20 of 300 still needs to have several skeletal structures replaced and internal tissue knitted, but the life threatening injuries are no more. I'll give the nanites time to begin repairs, then install new assemblages in a few hours."

Doctor moved over towards one bulkhead, the camera panning to follow. Shelves and hooks held a variety of instruments, most of them traditionally to be found in an engineering workshop, not a medical facility. Doctor put down the tool he still carried, reaching for a complicated piece of hardware approximately half a meter long.

"This? 20 of 300's leg was fried by the phaser he took. It will have to be replaced. I was just collecting some of the necessary materials." Pause. "Is he in pain? Now that is an irrelevant question. Of course he is not. You non-Borg are always worried about pain. 20 of 300 knows perfectly well what is going on; in fact he's quite interested. It is his body, you know. He's trying to talk me in to installing new muscle servo motors in his organic leg while he's on the table, but

I've got other things to do before such elective surgery can take place."

The camera's view turned slowly as the scene swung around the interior of the expanded nodal intersection. Besides the senescent drone on the table and Doctor muttering as he sifted through several incomprehensible items, two other drones were working quietly on a third, which itself was prone on another bench. The camera returned to Doctor.

"Ah, found the tool I wanted!" A rod thirty centimeters long blinked red and blue lights in Doctor's hand. The drone's head cocked to one side as he listened to a question. "Do I have any hobbies? Technically, I would have to answer no. Hobbies are irrelevant, after all. However...promise this won't get back to Captain, and I'll show you something."

Doctor began to push some machinery away from a second bulkhead, castors rolling smoothly on the deck. The plating behind was exposed, looking like any other wall on the cube. Doctor momentarily obstructed the camera's view as he reached out to push something. As he stepped away holding a sheet of metal, it could be seen that there was a hidden space. In the area was a...tank of fish?

A close-up zoom of the aquarium, in which five vaguely fishlike creatures swam. The animals were extremely pale, approaching the gray flesh tones of a Borg, and it appeared several miniature implants? were marring the scaled sides. Dark, brownish water was the medium the fish lived in.

"I like animals," stated Doctor as the camera returned to its normal magnification. The drone squatted slightly to peer into the tank. Two of the fish came to the side, bobbing up and down to follow a finger drawn across the glass. "The Collective considers pets irrelevant, and Captain also refuses to let me keep them. Sure, there may have been /some/ problems in the past, but I don't see how fish can hurt. I keep them in some nutrient fluid, and they are quite happy."

Doctor began to happily mutter nonsense phrases like "That's a good fishy-wishy." Now all five creatures were at the front of the tank, rapidly swimming back and forth, obviously responding to the voice. An audible clearing of the throat, the off-scene cameraman, broke the Borg out of his revelry.

"Oh, sorry. But they are cute, aren't they. After I replace this metal sheet, I'll show you what 2 of 27 and 121 of 133 are working on: removing salvageable parts from one of this sub-collective terminated in battle." The Doctor hefted the panel back to place.

<Fade out. Fade back to a different intersection. Red bar: "Designation: 13 of 20, also Assimilation. Location: Cube #347, Assimilation Workshop #6, subsection 23, submatrix 2. Time: Bh1.41g MN".>

The camera revealed an area not much different from the previous maintenance bay. Three tables with restraints took central stage in the large intersection, over which presided a virtual torture rack of unknown instruments. Unlike the maintenance bay, alcoves lined the walls, displays next to each set shoulder high in conjunction with incomprehensible data ports. Also vastly different from Doctor's workshop, the hardware appeared to be little used; this impression remained despite the fact half of the fourteen alcoves were currently filled.

Focus on one of the tan-uniformed bipeds in the alcove. The original skin coloration was impossible to determine, as the mottled gray of the Borg was the dominant feature. A few wisps of dark green hair still clung to the head, but it was rapidly being shed. The eyes - closed - were six, situated in two horizontal rows of three. A large, lipless mouth, much like that of a frog, completed the face. Pull back from the extreme close-up revealed a physique thin, but not

skinny...perhaps wiry if the being had been able to demonstrate movement. The other six slumbering individuals were much like the first, differing only in hair color (dark green to nearly white) and general body build.

"Species #8511, name Jharin. At this point, specimens are not considered to be physically distinctive, except for a hypothesized mental ability called grouf. Potential technological contribution unknown at this time," said a drone that up to this point had been ignored in favor of setting ambiance. The view swiveled to center the Borg in the picture.

A sigh racked the cyborg frame in response to a question. Head tilted to scan over the length of the nearest Jharin. "What happens now? Well, in a /normal/ cube, all eighty-two individuals which were subdued would begin processing: surgical implants, prosthetics, mental and physical alterations to make them most suitable for the type of primary service they would eventually provide for the Borg. That doesn't happen here.

"We have been given direction to insert hardware neural transceivers to replace the limited nanite-built ones, but that is about it. These new additions to the Collective have to remain in stasis until they can be off-loaded to a ship that isn't Cube #347. Assimilation imperfection can occasionally spread, you know.

"Makes for an extremely boring task."

The camera panned slowly back and forth, catching more of the motionless figures in alcoves. A display nearby beeped, but Assimilation was already moving to quiet the noise before the alarm sounded. The drone momentarily put his unaltered limb against the nearby data port, then pulled back.

"This one is ready."

<The red bar slightly altered, now including an additional name next to Assimilation. It read: "Designation: 3 of 8, also Second.">

Before the cameraman could comment, a transporter beam shimmered into existence, materializing yet another Borg. This one immediately began to speak. "Assimilation was not talking to you. This is a working cube, you know, not some private choreographed photoshoot staged for your own convenience."

Second stepped in front of Assimilation, dominating the scene with his presence. "We have to interrogate this new drone, now: information must be gained. It is a delicate process, and trust me, all the action will be taking place in dataspace you can not access, much less report back to your audience.

"Therefore, move along to the next stop on your little tour. Captain wants to talk to you for a couple of minutes, but it can wait until you've seen all the sights. These two units will make sure you get where you are supposed to be with a minimum of fuss." The camera recorded the entrance of two more Borg, this time by the conventional method of stepping in from an exterior corridor. One drone beckoned for the camera crew to follow.

<A second extended blank area to be later filled with commercials. In the new red bar was neither designation nor location information, but a pair of questions: "Is being Borg worth it?" and "Given the choice, would you rather be Borg or an individual?">

On the work bench, 20 of 300 opened his eye, optical machinery opposite suddenly showing activity. "Worth it? Definitely. At least now, when I get damaged, I can be fixed. Beats

my former life by a long shot."

29 of 300 in an alcove; she stepped forward and down, exiting with the audible sound of umbilicals disengaging. "That question is irrelevant. Of course I would want to be Borg."

Bending over a terminated drone, detaching an implant from deep in the body cavity, Doctor stopped. Nose twitching, he answered, "There are disadvantages, I admit, but given the choice of assimilation or not being a Borg, I must choose the former. Now, if you will point that camera over here...."

Three random drones, the trio working busily at replacing electrical cables within a bulkhead. Without a moment of hesitation, all reply sequentially, "Borg", "Borg", and "Borg."

Assimilation stood before an alcove reading a small display. The sentient within, eyes closed, lost the last of its visible hair as the camera watched. 13 of 20 turned and nodded. "Of course I would choose the Borg again. My prior life was finished anyway...what other choice did I have?"

On a previously unrecorded catwalk, Second turned to answer, "You wouldn't ask that question if you had experienced the Borg."

Captain twisted his neck in the eerie manner demonstrated at the beginning of the episode, catching the audience in a penetrating blue stare. Turning back to the large viewscreen, the immediate "presence" was still apparent, even if the disturbing, /knowing/ look was no longer directed to the masses. "That is a question I ask myself every day...and every day I remember my previous existence as a small being and am forced to answer yes.

"Being Borg is more than the hardware, more than the sheer power of knowledge gleaned from nearly nine thousand races. It is also about the quest of Oneness, of perfection, of harmony. Even chaos is predictable in its randomness; and, as one species states, 'There is a Song in the cosmos, and all the beings, to the tiniest matrix, are but notes and melodies seeking to Sing with the Whole.' It is irrelevantly poetic I admit, but it is one way for the unassimilated to relate to the mission of the Borg. We simply desire for this galaxy to experience the euphoria of One.

"And even if this particular sub-collective can not wholly join in the glory of the Collective, at least we know the lure of perfection. After experiencing even the most transient joyous moment of knowing, /being!/ part of a vast living machine that extends tens of thousands of light years, no sane being would desire to be small, to be single, again."

The drone was again facing the camera, this time with his whole body. An almost charismatic gleam had come to his eye, one not expected in a normal being, much less a feared member of the Borg Collective. For the first time, the camera noted that several other drones could be seen in the background, blinking lights and the occasional flash of an optical laser sight betraying their presence. Refocus on a definitely smiling Captain.

"Speaking of which...the Greater Consciousness desires that you also be added to the Collective. Do not worry, the initial pain will be rendered irrelevant upon your acceptance of Us. It has been authorized for your film and other data to be returned to your studio by mech courier, but the bodies themselves will stay."

"You will be assimilated. Resistance is futile." The latter was not only said by the still

amiable Captain, but echoed by the other drones also in the nodal intersection. The scene shifted as the camera fell, spinning wildly until it serendipitously stopped, pointing at a pair of furred, vaguely cat-like beings struggling as they were held by a quartet of drones.

The last scene recorded was that of a suddenly obstructing drone foot placed centimeters before the lens. Camera angle tilted upwards as something grabbed the casing. Captain's visage swung into view, then blackened out into a final fade as an off button was depressed.

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The final credits were scrolling through the senso's perception emitter; theme music blared its heavy backbeat. Gyola detached the flexible headband from her forehead, leaning back slightly in the unstable chair to stare at the ceiling. Moments later Arshly followed suit.

"Well?" asked the smaller male. "What do you think? I predict the audience will eat it up."

Gyola peered sideways at Arshly, allowing her ears to fold down against her skull. At the display, Arshly frowned, then began to feel nervous. "What? Did I do something wrong?"

"I recognized the camera crew. They were among the best combat reporters this company had. I assume they aren't coming back?"

Arshly gulped. "No ma'am, they aren't. But isn't that the risks the crews take? They did volunteer for the assignment after all. I have their signed releases in file with Legal. I...."

"No, that's not what I'm worried about," interrupted Gyola into the patter of frantic excuses. "Entertainment is a brutal business, and if you can't deliver, you might as well go do something tame, like be a pilot in Suicide Circuit shuttlewar races. No...the crew knew the possibilities when they shipped out, I just wanted confirmation that they were not returning."

Mutely nodding in the dark, Arshly maintained his posture of uncertainty.

Gyola replied, her voice becoming much more animated, "Well, too bad for them, because they are going to miss one hell of a party. I think when the ratings come back on this show, your career is going to be made. Congratulations!"

Arshly was extremely stunned, and it took a few moments for the words to sink in. When they did, however, the shout of pure glee the praise elicited could be heard throughout the studio complex.